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GREATER THAN *LOGOS*? KINAESTHETIC EMPATHY AND MASS PERSUASION IN THE CHORUSES OF PLATO'S *LAWS*

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INTRODUCTION

When considering the concept of persuasion through emotion, our first instinct may be to think of verbal persuasion. This chapter concerns a medium for persuasion through emotion that relies primarily on a non-verbal activity – participating in and watching the performances of a Classical Greek chorus. Time and time again, ancient sources point clearly towards the all-important visual, aural and, broadly, experiential effects of choral performance (*choreia*), beyond the dense imagery and ideas described in the choral text. However, the text is frequently the only source we have for choral performance, and we must work hard to factor in the inevitable impact of music and movement.

Scholarship, particularly since the late 1970s, has recognized the important role played by the singing and dancing chorus in the social, cultural and religious lives of cities and communities in the Classical Greek world.¹ Plato's extended theorization and discussion of the chorus's sociological function, found predominantly in books II and VII of his last work, the *Laws*, has been crucial for our understanding of this important role. But only very recently has Plato's presentation of choral culture been subjected to significant critical analysis.² Supported by a wave of on-going interest in the *Laws* as a rich (as well as difficult) work, together with a continuing fascination with choral performance (both in and out of tragedy),³ it is now possible to look afresh at Plato's contribution to our understanding of Classical Greek choral practice. While much of the impact of ancient choral performance is all but lost to us in the modern world – or at least lost in any obvious sense – it is still possible to gain a better grasp of the traction choral performance would have had in ancient Greek communities, and to clarify a

1 Calame (1977) is recognized as seminal for studies of the Classical Greek chorus, and since then see Herington (1985), Nagy (1990), Henrichs (1994/5), (Wilson 2000), Kowalzig (2007), Kurke (2007) and most recently two edited volumes: Gagné and Hopman (2013) and Billings, Budelmann and Macintosh (2013).

2 See Scolnicov and Brisson (2003), Laks (2005) and (2007), Bobonich (2010), Prauscello (2011), (2013) and (2014), Peponi (2013a) and (2013b), and Folch (2015).

3 Both Peponi (2013a) 212–39 and Prauscello (2011) 133–58 have rightly highlighted that Plato's choruses map most exactly onto the non-dramatic, civic chorus, e.g. the circular or 'dithyrambic' chorus.

picture that is necessarily obscured by partial and incomplete sources. Furthermore, the fact that Plato's *Laws* contains a comprehensive (if, at times, confusing) theory for mass persuasion that uses emotion and choral performance, makes it an exemplary subject for an enquiry in the context of a volume such as this.

A particularly interesting, and before now unrecognized, aspect of Plato's presentation of choral performance in the famous 'second best city' of the *Laws* is his description of a phenomenon, 'kinaesthetic empathy', that has only just begun to be articulated by theorists of cognitive behaviour and performance in the last hundred years.⁴ This process, whereby a spectator experiences a powerful emotive connection to a performer based on previous experience of what is being performed, is described with surprising clarity in book II of the *Laws* (657d1–6):⁵

Now while our young men are fitted for actually dancing themselves, we elders regard ourselves as suitably employed in looking on at them, and enjoying their sport and merry-making, now that our former nimbleness is leaving us; and it is our yearning regret for this that causes us to propose such contests for those who can best arouse in us through recollection [μνήμη ἐπεγείρειν] the dormant emotions of youth.⁶

What makes the use of this modern concept for analysing an ancient performance culture excitingly appropriate is that this phenomenon works by being contextualized and situated in a shifting landscape of historical, social and cultural factors. In a recent article in the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Strukus writes that 'cultural and historic factors are shaped and reshaped by embodied experience, and that the unconscious, neural foundations of kinaesthetic empathy exist in a dynamic and influential relationship to these other forces'.⁷ Such a construction of the phenomenon of kinaesthetic empathy allows us to see it in action in diverse locations and times – in fourth-century Athens or in an abstract and theoretical 'second best city' – and provides a framework for exploring the specific impact of choral performance in ancient Greek communities.

That we hear a convincing account of kinaesthetic empathy in an ancient text is interesting in and of itself. But that we find such an account in the writings of Plato is perhaps surprising if we, as many do, regard this author as constructing a subtly but significantly idiosyncratic picture of Classical Greek choral culture.⁸

4 Fundamental work was done by the philosophers Henri Bergson (1913/1889) and Theodor Lipps (1900). Greater interest has been fostered across disciplines since the so-called 'corporeal turn', for which see Sheets-Johnstone (2009). Of particular interest for kinaesthetic empathy in cultural practice is Reynolds and Reason (2012).

5 I use lower case letters when the page references are followed by specific line numbers, capitals when I refer to the whole section.

6 All translations are from Bury (1927).

7 Strukus (2011) 89.

8 See Peponi (2013b) 16–23. On the relationship of Plato's *Laws* to contemporary historical and social conditions, and to contemporary Crete and Sparta in particular, see Morrow (1960) 5–10 and 17–92. Kowalzig (2013) 175–6 rightly foregrounds the false distinction often made between the philosophical and the pragmatic with respect to Plato's *Laws*. Useful also is a comparison to what Aristotle states in book VIII of his *Politics*, on which see Peponi (2013a) 227–9.

The fact that the same process is described both in Plato's text and in contemporary studies of performance and cognition is both intriguing and suggestive. With this second theoretical underpinning, the possibility for persuasion through emotion in choral dance becomes less the brainchild of a brilliant but individual thinker, and more a common conception of a process well-known and recognized throughout the Classical Greek world. Using and understanding the modern concept of kinaesthetic empathy allows us to see more clearly what Plato is referring to, and perhaps encourages us to apply the theory behind this performative phenomenon to choral performance in the classical world more broadly.⁹

The concept of kinaesthetic empathy and Plato's construction of the persuasive, emotional chorus might be brought closer together by adducing a further strand of research conducted in a related area. Both Kowalzig and Kurke have shown how choral performance in particular was used in the fifth century to shape mythical narratives and affect the communities – past, present and future – that attached themselves to those narratives.¹⁰ The potential for choral performance to persuade fifth-century communities in this way is thoroughly in tune with the choral theories set out by Plato. We can also point to later examples of choral performance being used in similar ways. The lyric hymns of Philodamus and Isyllus, written respectively in the late fourth and early third centuries BCE, provide new mythological narratives that interact with the politics of the time. In doing so, these hymns offer further examples of choral performance being used to persuade whole communities.

That these later lyric texts seem both to exemplify Plato's choral theory *and* to provide examples of performances that are enriched by an understanding of kinaesthetic empathy prompts a bolder hypothesis. We might justifiably use Plato's choral theory in the *Laws* as indicative of an already existing understanding of (and already existing attitudes towards) the potency of choral performance. What is more, this non-verbal medium for persuasion may have been viewed, in terms of reach and impact, as the most powerful way to persuade in the ancient world.

This essay, then, seeks to elucidate three things. First, to demonstrate how in Plato's *Laws* the primary means of persuasion a) occurs through choral performance and b) relies *entirely* on the arousal of emotion through participating in and watching these choral performances. Second, to show how Plato seems to describe the phenomenon of kinaesthetic empathy in his theorization of the chorus. Third, to point to two texts from the Classical and early Hellenistic periods which might be read as supporting this picture of the chorus as the persuasive medium *par excellence*.

9 Space does not allow for a full exploration of the concept of kinaesthetic empathy in relation to ancient performance here. This essay will, it is hoped, act as a productive provocation for further study I plan to pursue in this area.

10 Kowalzig (2007) and Kurke (2007). See also Budelmann (2013) 81–98 on choral performance as both aesthetic object and ritually productive act.

THE PERSUASIVE CHORUS IN PLATO: AN INHERENTLY EMOTIONAL STATE

It is worth clarifying at the outset what the goal is for the persuasive endeavours of the main speaker (referred to only as ‘the Athenian’) in the *Laws*. In this work we have a relatively clear agenda set out, although it takes some time for it – and hence the goals of the vitally important *choreia* – to emerge. A Spartan, a Cretan and an Athenian are taking a long walk from Cnossos to Mount Ida and, after three books of conversation, they light upon a concrete task and subject for discussion, to ‘build up by arguments the framework of a State, as though we were erecting it from the foundation’ (702D). The state in question will be a new colony in Crete for which the Cretan, Cleinias, has been chosen (along with ten other Cnossians) to set up. Under the broad umbrella of discussing laws and government, the question of the citizens’ education (*paideia*) has already re-occurred a number of times.

It is always helpful to remember that when *paideia* (first mentioned at 641B) is talked about in the *Laws* it is, in general, a very different concept to what we understand by the term ‘education’ (the most common translation of the Greek word). Indeed it is very different to the kind of education set out for the Guardians, described in the *Republic*.¹¹ *Paideia* in the *Laws*, the goal towards which the Athenian’s persuasive efforts are aimed, is defined early on in book I and repeated at the beginning of book II.

The education [παιδεία] we speak of is training from childhood in goodness, which makes a man eagerly desirous of becoming a perfect citizen, understanding how both to rule and be ruled righteously. This is the special form of nurture to which, as I suppose, our present argument would confine the term ‘education’. (643e3–644a2)

With this particular kind of *paideia* in mind, what emerges from the rich but meandering discussion in book II is that the medium for the training and educating of all citizens should be choral song and dance. Both by watching and participating in choral dance, the citizens are to be persuaded to believe that the just life is, indeed, the best life and hence to achieve the goal of education as defined in books I and II.

The very particular end towards which the discussion is aiming should be factored into how we read the Athenian’s picture of choral culture; rather than adhering to tradition or purely honouring the gods, participation in choral culture is set up from the very beginning to be primarily for the correct education of the citizens. The ‘paideutic’ aspect of choral culture outside Plato’s presentation of it in the *Laws* is certainly likely.¹² However, its prominence in the choral culture of Plato’s work is nothing like what we can identify from other sources. Caution is advisable and it may be that we should understand this particular, prominent aim

11 For the difference in theories of ‘education’ in *Republic* and the *Laws*, see Mouze (2000) 57–69, Jouet-Pastré (2000) and (2006).

12 See Peponi (2007) 351–62.

of choral performance (i.e. that it is primarily for the sake of the *paideia* of the citizens) as, if not unique to Plato, certainly closely tied to his own particular aims and agenda in the dialogue.¹³

It is surprising how obliquely the chorus is first introduced into the discussion, considering the key role it will play in the new Cretan colony. An examination of the usefulness of institutional drinking parties is in progress, and the Athenian has suggested that there are serious benefits to be had in such drinking-parties, particularly with the aim of *paideia* in mind. He states that the safekeeping of correct *paideia* is dependent on the correct establishment of the institution that is to provide this *paideia*. We then, somewhat abruptly, turn to the following sketch of the cultural and sociological background to the institution of the Greek festival:

Ath: Now these forms of child-training, which consist in right discipline in pleasures and pains, grow slack [χαλᾶται] and weakened [διαφθείρεται] to a great extent in the course of men's lives; but the gods, in pity for the human race thus born to misery, have ordained the feasts of thanksgiving as periods of respite from their troubles; and they have granted them as companions in their feasts [ξυνεορτασταί] the Muses and Apollo the master of music, and Dionysus, that they may at least set right again their modes of discipline [ἵν' ἐπανορθῶνται τὰς γε τροφάς] by associating in their feasts with gods. We must consider, then, whether the account that is harped on nowadays is true to nature? What it says is that, almost without exception, every young creature [τὸ νέον] is incapable of keeping either its body or its tongue quiet, and is always striving to move and to cry, leaping and skipping and delighting in dances and games, and uttering, also, noises of every description. Now, whereas all other creatures are devoid of any perception of the various kinds of order and disorder in movement (which we term rhythm and harmony), to us men the very gods, who were given, as we said, to be our fellows in the dance [ἡμῖν δὲ οὗς εἵπομεν τοὺς θεοὺς συγχορευτὰς δεδόσθαι], have granted the pleasurable perception of rhythm and harmony, whereby they cause us to move and lead our choruses, linking us one with another by means of songs and dances; and to the chorus [χορός] they have given its name from the 'cheer' [χάρις] implanted therein. Shall we accept this account to begin with, and postulate that education owes its origin to Apollo and the Muses?

Clein: Yes.

Ath: Shall we assume that the uneducated man is without chorus-training, and the educated man fully chorus-trained?

Clein: Certainly. (653c7–654b2)

The passage on the surface appears somewhat disorganized.¹⁴ In the first half there is no mention of choral dance, only the 'training' (τροφή) that children receive and the discipline that may be regained at festivals. Only after the natural state of the young (τὸ νέος) is described as one of perpetual movement and making noise does the description of the gods shift from 'companions in the feast' (ξυνεορτασταί) to 'companions in choral dance' (συγχορευταί); this is the first explicit mention of choral dance in book II and only the second mention of the

13 For the ways Plato's broader agenda in the *Laws* impacts the presentation of choral culture, see Prauscello (2014).

14 Kurke (2013) 130–2, who gives the fullest analysis of the text, calls this a 'sneaky' passage. Kowalzig (2013) 174 and Prauscello (2013) 262 construe this passage as primarily addressing the divine aspects of *choreia*.

chorus in the entire work. The perception of rhythm and harmony (which, we presume, facilitates a kind of training of the movements of the young) is linked to mankind's desire to set up (and, peculiarly, to lead) choruses, and this in turn is meant to explain how the relevant gods – the Muses, Apollo and Dionysus – might be described as responsible for *paideia*.¹⁵ What we get from this passage, however, is the assertion that *choreia* educates and improves those who are present at these festivals.

What is also hinted at in this passage, and made more explicit throughout books II and VII is the idea that, when engaged in choral activity, the choreut is particularly susceptible to emotional responses and is, accordingly, in a more malleable state of mind and more ready to be persuaded. The role of pleasure in inspiring the setting up of choral dancers is therefore understandably prominent in the initial sketch of the sociological origins of *choreia* and is made explicit soon after:

Now then, take a man whose opinion about what is good is correct (it really *is* good), and likewise in the case of the bad (it really *is* bad), and follows this judgment in practice. He may be able to represent [in the choral dance], by word and gesture, and with invariable success, his intellectual conception of what is good, **even though he gets no pleasure from it and feels no hatred for what is bad**. Another man may not be very good at keeping on the right lines when he uses his body and his voice to represent the good, or at trying to form some intellectual conception of it; but he may be very much on the right lines in his feelings of pleasure and pain, because he welcomes what is good and loathes what is bad. (654c3–d3)

Here it is made clear that the emotional engagement of the individual within a choral performance is not just inevitable, but vital for the best kind of *paideia*. Pleasure and pain are used as the key markers for an individual's prime motivation to act.¹⁶ The potential is recognized for a choreut to sing and dance perfectly well and yet not feel the necessary emotions of pleasure and pain at what he is enacting. This is shown to be of less value (for the Athenian) than someone who may be less physically or vocally skilled, yet responds emotionally to the things that he should feel pleasure and pain towards. This is not to say that outward appearance and inward emotion are entirely separate in Plato's conception of the choral experience. A little later, the Athenian points us towards the connection between a cowardly soul and the postures attached to that state of being, or a courageous soul and its concomitant postures (654e9–655b6; 815e4–816a3). Nevertheless, the emotional response to the choral song and dance is clearly of central importance in this presentation of the chorus. The Athenian therefore sees the ideal choral performance as being useful for *paideia* primarily via the stirring up of correct emotion in the performer. Within the choral per-

15 Prauscello (2013) 258 describes the training alluded to here (2.653c7–654a5, 2.664e2–665a6) as 'the experience of a "correct" physiology of pleasure and pain'.

16 The tension between reason and the emotions of pleasure and pain is illustrated beautifully in a much-discussed passage in book I (644d7–645c1), see Kurke (2013) 123–70.

formance, pleasure and pain are not to be inevitable by-products of a particular state of mind, but are rather utilized to shape the individual choreut.¹⁷

This highly emotional, reasonless state of the choreut is made clear throughout the work and returned to a number of times. Through allusion, or tellingly revealing but unconscious slippages, the Athenian presents a picture of the choral experience that is underpinned by two analogic states of being: childhood, and the state of ritual frenzy or drunkenness. Through repeatedly associating the choral experience with these two states of mind, Plato presents the choreut as without rational thought and entirely dependent on the sensations of pleasure and pain.¹⁸

The tracing of associations between childhood and choral dance begins with that initial adumbration of the sociological origin and function of the chorus (653c7–654b2, quoted in full above) where the impulse of the young to move and make noise is harnessed and utilized in the song and dance of the chorus. It is likely that Plato is able to sketch this rough aetiology of the chorus in the way he does because he is drawing together things (festival, *paideia*, choral dance and divine companionship at festival) that were already familiar and closely associated in the minds of his audience. But even if Plato's audience did not have as much difficulty as we do in tracing how the logic of the passage proceeds, this should not obscure the fact that the associations made between childhood (the inability to cease from moving and making noise) and choral dance, and the apparent return to childhood inherent in festival celebrations, have an important role in the Athenian's presentation of the choral experience. Further passages confirm that this association between childhood and choral dance is essential for the construction of choral culture in the ideal city of the *Laws*. Indeed this association acts as one of a number of associations that encourage our impression of a particularly receptive choral body.

We find a fusion of the emotional states of childhood and *choreia*, in addition to further associations with Bacchic frenzy and a lack of reason, in the conclusion to the long argument for the social and educational benefit of drinking parties.

There is a little-known current of story and tradition which says that Dionysus was robbed of his wits by his stepmother Hera, and that he gets his revenge by stimulating us to Bacchic frenzies and all the mad dancing [ἡ μανικὴ χορεία] that results; and this was precisely the reason why he made us a present of wine. This sort of story, however, I leave to those who see no danger in speaking of the gods in such terms. But I am quite certain of this: no animal that enjoys the use of reason in its maturity is ever born with that faculty, or at any rate with it fully developed. During the time in which it has not yet attained its characteristic level of intelligence, it is completely mad [πάν μαίνεται]: it bawls uncontrollably, and as soon as it can get on its feet it jumps about with equal abandon. Let's think back: we said that this situation gave rise to music and gymnastics. (672b3–c6)

17 See Peponi (2013a) 212–39 for the emphasis on pleasure in Plato's description of *choreia* in the *Laws*.

18 This touches on the larger debate concerning the existence of 'rational persuasion' in the *Laws* – see e.g. Bobonich (1991) 365–88, Powell (1994) 273–321, Laks (2007) 130–52. My own view (at present a minority one) is that as far as choral performance goes there is no reason or *logos*, only emotion and habituation, see further below on *Laws* 670b8–c2.

The importance of the myth is highlighted by the Athenian's professed ignorance of its truth (if he thought the myth irrelevant, why include it?). It is in this myth of Dionysus's vengeance that we find the connection between Bacchic frenzy (possibly inspired by wine) and the loss of one's rational capacities. We can infer this from the fact that the rites are introduced as appropriate vengeance for Hera's robbing Dionysus of his own soul's judgment. The gift of wine, Bacchic rites and *choreia* are all linked in this initial myth. The Athenian then goes on to strengthen those connections, first between the state of childhood and lack of reason ('no animal that enjoys the use of reason in its maturity is ever born with that faculty, or at any rate with it fully developed') and then between this reasonless state of childhood and the frenzy and physical movement found in Bacchic rites ('During the time in which it has not yet attained its characteristic level of intelligence, it is completely mad'). The final reminder of the previous discussion of the origins of music and gymnastics carries the echo of the association established there too of childhood and *choreia* (653d7–654a5).¹⁹

Although not specifically tied to *choreia* we see elsewhere the effect of wine described as making one feel younger and at the same time making the drinker more malleable: 'when this takes place, the souls of the drinkers turn softer, like iron, through being heated, and younger too; whence they become ductile, just as when they were young, in the hands of the man who has the skill and ability to train and mould them' (671b8–c2).²⁰ Wine then simulates in the old what comes naturally to those who are young, namely, a kind of malleability. This ductile quality may be added to the analogous states that touch on or are introduced around the presentation of choral performance.

Later in book VII we find a similar description of these analogous states of being in the early stages of the Athenian's prescriptions for childcare.

Thus when mothers have children suffering from sleeplessness, and want to lull them to rest, the treatment they apply is to give them, not quiet, but motion, for they rock them constantly in their arms; and instead of silence, they use a kind of crooning noise; and thus they literally cast a spell upon [καταυλοῦσι] the children (like the victims of Bacchic frenzy) by employing the combined movements of dance and song as a remedy. (790d5–e4)

Once more, the Athenian blends the state of childhood (here very young children) and Bacchic frenzy, and shows how *choreia* might act as a medium to affect their agitated, emotional state. It is significant that we are reminded in this way (at the beginning of book VII where the systematic programme for choral training and *paideia* is to be set out) of the potential vulnerability of those in states of mind analogous to that of choral performance.

By adducing these analogous states in the initial description of choral culture in an ideal city, and firmly associating that choral state with a highly emotional state, the receptivity and malleability of the choral body is emphasized. Reason and logic, then, have little to do with the response and effect of choral dance. As

¹⁹ For a slightly different reading of this and the next passage, see Prauscello (2013) 266–70.

²⁰ See also 666b2–c2.

already mentioned above, most people are shown to use pleasure as their prime motivator for calling anything (choral or otherwise) good or bad (667B–671A), but this is shown to be deficient, and the Athenian points to the example of the theatres in Sicily and Italy as evidence of this (659B–C). Instead, the Athenian entrusts knowledge of what makes a good or bad choral dance to those in the ideal society with the most experience, and hence wisdom, on the subject (657D–659D, 664E–665D, 668D–671A). Indeed, the Athenian flatly denies that expertise in the matters of good and bad choral dances may be found in more than a few members of society.²¹ In no uncertain terms, the choral dancers are said to be acting in utter ignorance:

The belief of the general public, that they can form an adequate judgment of merit and demerit in matters of harmony and rhythm, is laughable [γελοῖος]: they have only been drilled [διδασκασμένοι] into singing to the pipes and marching in step, and they never stop to think that they do all this without the smallest understanding of it [δρῶσιν τὰ ταῦτα ἀγνοοῦντες]. (670b8–c2)

To dance in the chorus is to return to childhood, to lose one's sense, to enter an initiation and to give oneself up to emotion. The highly emotional and reasonless state of mind of the choral dancer seems to deny the ability of the choral dancer to reason for herself or gain any agency within choral performances in the ideal city.

THE PERSUASIVE CHORUS IN PLATO: PERSUASION THROUGH *MIMĒSIS*

We have seen how engaging in choral performance puts the participant into a particularly emotional and malleable state of mind, ready for persuading towards civic virtue (whatever that may mean). What is specific to choral performance (as opposed to being in one of those similarly emotional states of childhood or frenzy) is that the inherently mimetic nature of *choreia* allows the participant to take in and be shaped by what is being sung and danced, at the direction of, ultimately, the lawgivers of the second-best city. The potential for *mimēsis* to impact the one who imitates is already well attested and much discussed, particularly with reference to Plato's *Republic*.²² In that work, *mimēsis* was deemed wholly dangerous. In the *Laws*, however, it has a place and is relied on in many ways to allow the citizens almost to persuade themselves.

There is an important proviso that follows the well-known sound bite – ‘the man who is unpractised in choruses is an uneducated man’. As the Athenian goes on to say a little later ‘Our words are, “he sings well and dances well”: ought we,

21 Prauscello (2013) 264 does not read the work as having this ‘anti-rational attitude’, though she does not engage directly with the passage quoted here.

22 See Stalley (1983) 127–9 for a summary of the various kinds of *mimēsis* referred to in *Republic* and what bearing they have on the mimetic aspect of choral performance as described in the *Laws*. For a judicious untangling of Aristotelian *mimēsis*, see Halliwell (1990) 487–510.

or ought we not, to add, “provided that he sings good songs and dances good dances”?’ If the content is not, in fact, good, the performer will suffer a kind of incorrect training, since the mimetic nature of choral performance serves to assimilate the performer with what is performed. The Athenian convinces his interlocutors of this by means of a comparison to a man living with the bad habits of wicked men. There, even if a man is aware that he should be ashamed to be associated with such habits, by a process of assimilation after time, he will grow to approve of them.

Is it not probable or rather inevitable that the result here will be exactly the same as what takes place when a man who is living amongst the bad habits of wicked men, though he does not really abhor but rather accepts and delights in those habits, yet censures them casually, as though dimly aware of his own turpitude? In such a case it is, to be sure, inevitable that the man thus delighted **becomes assimilated to those habits** [τότε ὁμοιοῦσθαι], good or bad, in which he delights, even though he is ashamed to praise them. **Yet what blessing could we name, or what curse, greater than that of assimilation that befalls us so inevitably?** [καί τοι τοῦ τοιούτου τί μείζον ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακὸν φαίμεν ἂν ἡμῖν ἐκ πάσης ἀνάγκης γίγνεσθαι;] (656b1–7)

The Athenian points us towards the connection between a cowardly soul and the postures attached to that state of being, or a courageous soul and its concomitant postures (654e9–655b6, 815e4–816a3). We see the power of choral performance to shape the opinion of the performer once more, summed up in riddling style when the Athenian identifies the advantage of choral performance in the following way: ‘we rejoice (χαίρωμεν) whenever we think we are prospering, and, conversely, whenever we rejoice we think we are prospering’ (657c5–6). The relationship between action and the effect on the person performing the action is seen as mutually reinforcing. We might also recall the warnings concerning *mimêsis* expressed in the *Republic*, where imitation of unworthy objects was also deemed to be damaging to the soul of the imitator.

The potential of choral performance, by virtue of its mimetic quality, to *improve* the performer (and audience too) is shown later in books VIII and XII, where we see how this choral capability for positively reinforcing attitudes through action is used for the benefit of society with regards to training for war (e.g. 830c–831a and 942d2–e1). By allowing for the positive impact of *mimêsis* within the choral body, the Athenian mobilizes a powerful tool for acts of mass persuasion.

KINAESTHETIC EMPATHY IN THE *LAWS*

And yet, the power of *choreia* not only has an effect on those actually participating in any given choral performance.²³ Through the process of kinaesthetic

23 Peponi (2013a) 225–6 has seen in the *Laws* a strategy to ‘de-aestheticize’ *choreia*; the repeated emphasis on the pleasure of the performer herself means that the choral performance as an aesthetic object no longer exists. And yet by reading into Plato’s text a notion of kinaes-

empathy the persuasion of choral performance can have an impact on both participant and spectator.²⁴ Given the universal participation in festivals in this ideal city, the inclusion of the phenomenon of kinaesthetic empathy in the sketch of choral culture allows the persuasion to reach every single member of the city in one single performance.

As already stated, then, the Athenian recognizes that what makes the chorus all the more powerful as a tool for persuasion is the fact that it is not just the choral performer who is persuaded; those who watch the choral performers are also affected by the same kinds of emotion as felt by the choreut. The 'Watching Dance' project, acknowledged as one of the most important research centres for examining kinaesthetic empathy in the modern world, notes this phenomenon with reference to dance in particular. 'Spectators of dance experience kinaesthetic empathy when, even while sitting still, they feel they are participating in the movements they observe, and experience related feelings and ideas'.²⁵

The Athenian in the *Laws* alludes to just this experience when describing how the elder members of the city no longer dance themselves but instead watch the choreia of others and, in watching, remember their own choral experience (657d1–6, quoted above). We see this again hinted at in a passage, already discussed above, describing the aetiology of the festival: '... and they have granted them as companions in their feasts the Muses and Apollo the master of music, and Dionysus, that they may set right again their modes of discipline by associating in their feasts with gods' (654c7–d5). Here the idea is clear that associating with those who are, as Prauscello has put it, examples of 'embodied morality'²⁶ will have an effect on everyone present, whether they're performers or spectators. More generally throughout book II, the discussion focuses variously on the participant and the observer of choral performance, strongly suggesting that, in Plato's eyes, there was no great distance between the two experiences. Peponi discusses a passage (655D–656A) that highlights the intriguing slippage between internal and external spectator (i.e. performer and spectator), an example of the way that performer and spectator are often assimilated in the *Laws*.²⁷ Such a slippage may be deliberate on the part of the author. Alternatively we might infer from such assimilations of a performer and a spectator's experience that this was already a commonly held attitude in Plato's contemporary world.

thetic empathy, those who watch the choral performance and those who perform it need not necessarily be as rigidly separated as Peponi suggests. The repeated blurring of boundaries between spectator and performer, identified by Peponi herself, seems to indicate the connection between the two is so close as to be inseparable.

24 Prauscello (2013) 259 formulates this in terms of *mimēsis* – '[In the *Laws* *mimēsis*] is active at both a representational (*mimēsis qua* representation) and performative level (*mimēsis qua* enactment)'.
 25 http://www.watchingdance.org/research/kinesthetic_empathy/index.php accessed 30th March 2015.

26 Prauscello (2013) 259.

27 Prauscello (2013) 218–20.

The power of using choral performance as a medium for persuasion will, therefore, work on two levels. First, it is an activity that places the performer in an emotional and particularly receptive state. Second, the familiarity of all citizens with the content of choral dance enables those attitudes to be reinforced through kinaesthetic empathy on an almost daily basis, according to the calendar described later on in the *Laws*. As with so much in the *Laws*, this idea is not clearly stated (although it is certainly alluded to, see above). However, it seems reasonable to see the phenomenon of kinaesthetic empathy as very much part of the Athenian's justification for the central importance of choral culture in the construction of the ideal city in the *Laws*.

THE CHORUS IN CLASSICAL GREECE: A WEAPON OF MASS PERSUASION

Is the model that Plato outlines in the *Laws* a plausible example of an alternative medium for persuasion in Classical Greece? What I would like to do in the final part of this chapter is suggest how this kind of persuasion (that is, persuasion through participating in and watching choral performance) might be recognized in the wider world of Classical Greece. That choral performance acted both to reinforce and to reinvent social and cultural attitudes in the Classical period is no longer in question. Recent work has moved forward the discussion of the intersection between choral poetry and history considerably.²⁸ While for Plato the power of choral performance lies in the harmony of movement and music and the pleasurable acculturation of certain values, Kowalzig has argued that the power of choral performance lies in its unifying myth and ritual, elements that in themselves work to unite past and present.

It is through choral performance that myth and ritual become socially effective, for it offers a medium for myth and ritual to come together.... [Choral performances] emerge as a creative means for the delineation of worshipping communities by allowing for a constant reconfiguration of mythical pasts and ritual presents. Religious song, performances of myth and ritual, turn out to be a productive activity with a full and dynamic share in historical processes and social change, above all through the way it opens up new social realities formulated through the myth-ritual interface.²⁹

Might we compare the 'productive activity' Kowalzig identifies in choral lyric with the persuasive power accorded to choral performance in Plato? There are certainly some suggestive comparisons to be made with Struck's recognition that 'cultural and historic factors are shaped and reshaped by embodied experience', with respect to kinaesthetic empathy.³⁰ In Athens, if not all over Greece, the level of participation in civic choruses was such that we can justifiably imagine both

28 Again Kowalzig (2007) and Kurke (2007) are fundamental here.

29 Kowalzig (2007) 393.

30 See note 7 above.

performer and spectator as being familiar with at least a certain level of choral choreography and language.³¹ With this neuro-physiological language set alongside texts that lend themselves well to the kind of process outlined by both Plato and modern performance theorists like Struck, the case for the persuasive power of *choreia* becomes more credible.

Added to this we might also briefly point to two hymns, written in the late fourth and early third centuries BCE respectively, that have a comparable socio-political agenda to the texts analysed by Kowalzig and Kurke. A paean written by Isyllus and inscribed at Epidauros around the very beginning of the third century, gives the god Asclepius a thoroughly Epidaurian aetiology.³² It seems that, in doing so, the choral performance of the hymn provided the means of persuasion to all those who saw the chorus perform, or read the inscribed hymn thereafter. The story they were being persuaded to believe was that, contrary to any other tales of Asclepius's heritage, this story that he belonged and had always belonged in Epidauros held the greatest authority. A similar kind of story could be told of Philodamus's paean to Dionysus.³³ In that fragmentary inscription dated to 340/39 BCE, the gods Apollo and Dionysus are brought close together,³⁴ a move that seems to have been rooted in some kind of actual change at Delphi (where the hymn was found) and the possible acceptance of Dionysus into the cult of Apollo simultaneous with the rebuilding of his temple. These hymns were then inscribed on stone for future visitors to see and be persuaded of their authoritative content, namely, the 'rebranding' of Dionysus as majestic and lordly as opposed to the ecstasy and frenzy so frequently associated with the god.³⁵ The potential for a reader to relive the experience of viewing or performing in that choral performance fits nicely with the blurred conception of spectator/performer prompted by the phenomenon of kinaesthetic empathy.

CONCLUSION

In the fifth, fourth and third centuries BCE, both before and after the time when Plato was writing, there are sources – literary and epigraphic – testifying to or hinting at the power of choral performance to persuade and shape the attitudes both of those citizens who take part in the performance and the spectators who make up the broader community. Taken on their own we might be less inclined to

31 Around 10% of the male population (citizens and non-citizens) of Athens were required to participate in the choruses each year (not only of the Great Dionysia but also all the other festivals that included choral performances: the Lenaia, Rural Dionysia, Thargelia, the Little and Great Panathenaia and, possibly, the Promethia and Hephaistia).

32 For full discussion of this poem and its political agenda, see Kolde (2003).

33 See most recently Bouchon, Brillet-Dubois and Le Meur-Weissman (2012) and Calame (2009) on this hymn.

34 A kind of 'religious syncretism', Rutherford (2001) 132. Furley and Bremer (2001) 73 argue against the term 'syncretism' as the identities of the two gods are maintained.

35 Furley and Bremer (2001) 67.

award these poems and performances any serious persuasive power. Yet in light of the presentation of the power of choral performance in Plato's *Laws*, and strengthened by an understanding of the phenomenon of kinaesthetic empathy, we may be more justified in crediting *choreia*, at least in Classical Greece, with a persuasive power that outweighed the persuasions of *logos*.

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